

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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MISSION AND ROLE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The enabling legislation of the National Park Service in 1916 stated that:

“The Service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations . . . by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose . . . to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations (NPS Organic Act, 16 USC 1).”

“The National Park Service will manage the natural resources of the national park system to maintain, rehabilitate and perpetuate their inherent integrity.”

The vegetation management policy is designed to perpetuate native plant life as part of natural ecosystems. The concept of managing in the context of entire ecosystems is critical to the long-term preservation of national park lands. Ecosystem management is a guiding principle of national park management.

GENERAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The National Park Service (NPS) is a decentralized organization within the Department of Interior organized at three levels of authority: the Washington office, 10 regional offices, and the individual park units. The basic unit is the park staff, and the assignment of responsibilities among employees reflects the essential functions: cultural and natural resource management, protection of park resources and park visitors, visitor services and interpretation, maintenance of facilities and administration support services. The regional office is the instrument through which the Director can communicate with 343 field areas, and vice versa, managing over 76 million acres. The Washington Office, administered by a Director, develops general policies and standards, sets priorities, and coordinates servicewide resource management and research programs. Prior to their transfer to the National Biological Service, the Western Regional office operated 5 cooperative research study units, asso-

ciated with universities. These include 20 scientists, 4 of which are full-time botanists in California.

The number of full-time employees in the National Park Service in California is around 700. Of these, around 10 are full-time botanists, or whose duties are primarily as botanists, augmented by several seasonal botanists. The number is woefully inadequate.

The Western Region administers 43 national parks, monuments, historic sites, national seashores, national rivers and trails and national recreation areas in four states and two territories. The office is responsible for the states of Arizona, California, Hawaii and Nevada, and the territories of Samoa and Guam. The lands comprise 8 million acres with a diversity of habitats. Western Region has more listed species than all the other regions. The National Park Service manages 4.7 million acres in California, which provide habitat for more than 300 special status plants.

Within a park, management of natural systems is based on zones; natural zones (natural resources managed with a concern for fundamental ecological processes as well as for individual species), cultural zones (preserve cultural resources), and park development zones (intensive visitor use).

In addition, NPS is responsible for lands with special designation. National parks in the WR administer Wilderness Areas in 22 national park units, including nearly 3 million acres. Also there are 67 National Natural Landmarks (NNL) in the Western Region, 34 of which occur in California. These lands, although often held privately, are given special recognition by NPS because of natural features that are deemed nationally significant. Examples of NNL lands in California include Nipoma Dunes and Consumnes River Preserve. Individual park ecosystems that are components of regional ecosystems believed to be internationally significant may be designated as Biosphere Reserves administered by the Man and the Biosphere Program under UNESCO; there are six in California. Examples include the Mojave Desert, central coastal California, and Sequoia/Kings Canyon NP. World Heritage sites are also designated under UNESCO and administered by NPS; there are two in California (Redwood NP and Yosemite NP).

SCOPE OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PLANT CONSERVATION

Legal mandates for plant conservation in NPS include the National Environmental Policy Act, Wilderness Act, Endangered Species Act of 1973, and Organic Act of 1916.

The objective of NPS for plant conservation is to perpetuate native plant life as part of natural ecosystems. Landscapes and plants may be manipulated to restore or enhance the functioning of the plant

and animal community, or to benefit threatened, endangered and sensitive species.

Revegetation Program. The Western Region has a directive to promote revegetation throughout all parks. Revegetation efforts in natural zones will use natural regeneration, and seeds or transplants representing species and gene pools native to the ecological portion of the park where the restoration project occurs.

Fire monitoring program. Prescribed and natural fires contribute to the conservation of plants by restoring an area to a natural range of conditions. Reseeding efforts after fires are discouraged, as in the case of the 1993 fire in Santa Monica Mountains NP.

Threatened, endangered and sensitive species (TES) program. This program identifies and promotes the conservation of all federally listed TES species and state and locally listed threatened, endangered, rare, declining, sensitive or candidate species that are native to and present in the parks, and their critical habitats. All special status species are given the same protection as federally listed species. Administratively, this program has a TES coordinator at each level of NPS from Washington to individual park units.

Inventory and monitoring program. The policy of NPS is to assemble baseline inventory data describing the natural resources under its stewardship, to monitor these resources forever, to detect or predict changes that may require intervention, and to provide reference points for comparisons. A guide to this program is presented in NPS-75 (1992).

Alien species management program. This program places high priority on the management of alien species that have a substantial impact on park resources and that can reasonably be expected to be controlled.

HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

Inventory and monitoring program. This involves 1) a Servicewide vegetation mapping of all NPS lands and creation of a nationwide classification system, and 2) the development of a database of native plants occurring on NPS land (NPFLORA). The database will include information on systematics, distribution and abundance, and curation. Ultimately, this program will link into a geographic information system.

Restoration projects. Major restoration projects are occurring in many parks in California. Examples include watershed restoration for over 15 years at Redwood NP using innovative technologies; proposed restoration of the Giant Forest in Sequoia/Kings Canyon

NP by removing 50 years of infrastructure and restricting cars; and Lake Merced restoration at Yosemite NP.

Native plant propagation. This is occurring at 12 parks in California. For example, Aberdeen Plant Materials Center entered into an agreement with Lava Beds NM to produce seed and plants of native plant species for revegetation purposes and to develop propagation methods. Joshua Tree National Monument has an arid lands restoration center.

Celebrating wildflowers. This is a collaborative commemoration between several federal land management agencies to promote the importance of conservation and management of native plants and plant habitats.

Volunteer activities in parks have contributed substantially in plant conservation and education. For example, at Golden Gate NRA alone, over 10,000 volunteer hours have been devoted to plant restoration projects at more than 40 sites. Golden Gate NRA has also initiated a Site Stewardship program to foster long-term efforts for groups of volunteers at specific sites.

The Western Region is involved in several interagency committees and task groups in California such as the Executive Council on Biodiversity, bioregional councils, and the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project.

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OVERVIEW OF THE USDA-FOREST SERVICE

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THE MISSION AND ROLE OF THE FOREST SERVICE

By law, the Forest Service is required to manage national forest resources for water supply, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, timber, range, and other renewable uses. Many goods and services provided are sold or are subject to user fees.

The phrase "CARING FOR THE LAND AND SERVING PEOPLE", captures the Forest Service mission. As set forth in federal